United Nations A/68/169

General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 July 2013

Original: English

Sixty-eighth session
Item 27 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Social development: social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Promoting social integration through social inclusion

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 66/122, on promoting social integration through social inclusion. It builds on the findings of three previous reports on social integration (E/CN.5/2009/2, E/CN.5/2010/2 and E/CN.5/2011/2) and reviews recent developments in three major areas: social protection, education, and institution-building and policy coherence.

* A/68/150.

13-40292 (E) 120813

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. Social integration is the process of advancing social development by building the values, relationships and institutions essential for the creation of a society for all. Through social integration, all individuals can exercise their rights and responsibilities fully and participate equally in political, social, cultural and economic life.

2. Social inclusion efforts involve various strategies that are aimed mainly at empowering vulnerable groups to benefit from, and contribute to, development. Actions in this area have focused mostly on addressing the special circumstances and needs of disadvantaged social groups in order to advance their integration into mainstream society.

3. Social inclusion efforts are critical to achieving social cohesion. Social cohesion refers primarily to the overall capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimize disparities of opportunity and avoid polarization and conflicts. Socially cohesive societies are bound by a social contract based on a shared understanding of individual rights and responsibilities.

4. The international community has recognized that the promotion of sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth should be complemented by effective social protection so that individuals in vulnerable and marginalized situations benefit from the gains of economic growth. Member States were, in General Assembly resolution 66/122, called upon to implement social inclusion strategies that promoted social integration and ensured social protection floors for vulnerable groups. Such floors would protect those groups' social and economic rights. To that end, States were encouraged to create national institutions or agencies for promoting, implementing and evaluating social inclusion programmes and mechanisms at the national and local levels.

5. Although social integration has long been endorsed as the overall framework for advancing social development and social policymaking, the goal of achieving socially cohesive societies has remained elusive, with many vulnerable groups and individuals remaining largely excluded from development benefits.

6. At the same time, persistent socioeconomic inequalities and episodes of social unrest have generated awareness of the critical nature of social inclusion efforts in making development truly inclusive. Policies and programmes promoting social inclusion, integration and cohesion are gradually becoming part of national development strategies.

7. The present report highlights recent regional analysis of social integration and cohesion issues published subsequent to the report of the Secretary-General issued in 2010, which was focused mainly on national policies and programmes towards social integration (E/CN.5/2011/2).

II. Overview of social inclusion, social integration and social cohesion

8. In many parts of the world, social integration is increasingly being eroded by globalization, growing social and economic inequality, generational divisions and

the rise of individualism and identity politics. In the absence of social inclusion, such trends may lead to weak social policy outcomes and social instability that may undermine the political legitimacy of Governments.

9. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recently analysed the concept of social cohesion, its importance to development and the ways in which it could be measured. OECD identified three components of social cohesion: social inclusion, social capital and social mobility. Social inclusion was seen as a measure of such dimensions of social exclusion as poverty, inequality and social polarization. Social capital combined interpersonal and societal trust and a range of forms of civic engagement. Social mobility related to the degree to which people could, or believed that they could, change their position in society.

10. The OECD research suggested that cohesive societies relied on policy measures aimed at combating social exclusion and marginalization, advancing social mobility and building social capital. The success of such measures rested largely on the adoption of an inclusive policy framework and coordinated policymaking, in particular in the areas of employment, social protection, civic participation, education, gender and migration.[1]

11. There have been significant differences in regional approaches to social integration and social inclusion, especially regarding the concept and measurement of social cohesion. Notable attempts at conceptualizing and measuring social cohesion have been made in the European and Latin American contexts.

12. In 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a new strategy and Council action plan for social cohesion in which social cohesion was defined as "the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members — minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation — to manage differences and divisions and ensure the means of achieving welfare for all members".

13. The Action Plan articulates four pillars of social cohesion: reinvesting in social rights and a cohesive society; building a Europe of responsibilities that are both shared and social; strengthening representation and democratic decision-making and expanding social dialogue and civic engagement; and building a secure future for all. The European Committee for Social Cohesion has coordinated the implementation of the Action Plan by States, which are to provide feedback on implementation at the national level and exchange experiences, methods and best practices.

14. At the core of the approach was the idea that social cohesion was critical to the enjoyment of human rights, stable democracy and the rule of law.

15. The concept of social cohesion developed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean stemmed from national-level experiences in the region. It was dominated by the idea of forging a view of development that went beyond economic growth and was based on the guiding principles of equity and social integration.[2] The Commission's approach to social cohesion emphasized the relationships between mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the region and

[1] OECD, *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World* (Paris, 2011).

[2] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Social Cohesion in Latin America: Concepts, Frames of Reference and Indicators* (LC/G.2420), p. 77.

citizens' perceptions of how such mechanisms operated. The regional social cohesion framework identified three interacting pillars of social cohesion: disparities or gaps, institutional realities and subjective factors. Moreover, four arenas — or social institutions that played a significant role in building social cohesion — were identified as relevant to the region: social relationships, citizenship, the market and social protection.

16. In that approach, social relationships shaped whether an individual felt accepted and recognized by the family group or the community, such as in cases of children born out of wedlock or subjected to high levels of intrafamily violence. Citizenship and the building of citizenry depended entirely on the existence of democratically elected holders of public office, legitimate electoral and political processes with the active participation of citizens, the enforcement of laws (once enacted) and free media. Economic participation was conducive to social cohesion because it led to fair outcomes for all in terms of economic recognition and social mobility. The recognition that social protection was a fundamental right of all individuals by virtue of their being members of society was critical to preventing social polarization in the region.

III. Strategies towards social integration

17. Social protection, education and institution-building are key to social integration and social cohesion.

A. Social protection

18. There is a growing recognition that expanding social protection, combined with the provision of social services, fosters social cohesion. The commitment to building basic social protection schemes stems from a broader sense of solidarity by which society recognizes, and acts upon, its responsibility to ensure basic protection for those most vulnerable and in need.

19. Social protection, broadly understood, is the set of public policies and programmes seeking to provide people with minimum levels of security in meeting their basic needs. In line with local conditions and priorities, countries have adopted diverse definitions and approaches to social protection, including cash transfers, social pensions and social safety nets. Attempts at building universal, non-contributory social protection floors — with a minimum of access to basic services and basic income security — have been made in a number of developing countries in recent years.

20. In the past decade or so, Latin American countries have been at the forefront of expanding innovative anti-poverty programmes, such as conditional income transfers, non-contributory pensions and child and family benefits. Programmes implemented have encompassed, among others, pure income transfers to households living in poverty, transfers combining income supplements with basic service provision or utilization (often linked to health care, schooling and nutrition) and

integrated anti-poverty programmes offering tailored transfers and preferential access to services for socially excluded groups and communities.[3]

21. The programmes have been aimed at addressing the main factors contributing to persistent and intergenerational poverty: low income, lack of employment and lack of access to education and health care. In the main, they have targeted families with young children. They are all tax-financed, public interventions led by social assistance agencies. They are estimated to have reached some 32 per cent of people living in poverty throughout Latin America.[4]

22. In Asia and the Pacific, social protection was seen by Member States as an inclusive development instrument conducive to reducing poverty, inequality and exclusion in the wake of the 2008 food, fuel and financial crises.[5] It was also perceived as an investment and a core component of national development policy that contributed to building cohesive and stable societies and fostering trust between Governments and citizens.

23. It was expected that the expansion of social protection would contribute to economic growth by increasing the consumption power of poor households and stimulating demand for local goods and services. It was also expected that the risk insurance afforded by social protection would allow people to better take advantage of their skills and potential and enable them to contribute more fully to economic development.

24. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has recommended that Member States adopt a staircase approach to social protection. That approach is aimed ultimately at providing universal access and rights to social protection through incremental steps by targeting the most vulnerable groups first.

25. Low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa, which have low revenue-raising capacity and high administrative costs, have found the provision of self-financed social protection programmes a challenge. There is, however, growing evidence from both existing programmes and simulations that the basic elements of a social protection floor may be fiscally affordable in most low-income countries, beginning with non-contributory old-age pensions, child grants or public works.[6] Resources will need to be mobilized and reallocated within national budgets in order to expand social protection provisions beyond those programmes.

26. Political commitment and national financing and control have characterized most, if not all, successful social protection schemes in Africa. In several countries, the Governments' lack of commitment to some form of social protection has arisen

[3] For examples of specific programmes, see Armando Barrientos, Miguel Niño-Zarazúa and Mathilde Maitrot, "Social Assistance in Developing Countries database version 5", Brooks World Poverty Institute Working Paper Series (Manchester, Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester, 2010).

[4] Armando Barrientos, "On the distributional implications of social protection reforms in Latin America", WIDER Working Papers Series, No. 2011/69 (Helsinki, United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research, November 2011).

[5] *The Promise of Protection: Social Protection and Development in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.11.II.F.5).

[6] International Labour Organization, *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization: report of the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2011).

from the fact that the citizens have not yet mobilized effectively to demand social protection, as has occurred in other countries of the region.[7]

27. The growing acceptance on the part of Governments of the need for universal social protection — with interventions targeting specific groups that would serve as building blocks towards universal coverage — has been observed worldwide. Social protection strategies, their numerous benefits notwithstanding, have not, however, proved effective in eliminating long-standing forms of economic and social discrimination against specific groups. According to OECD, where dual social protection systems have developed (with the poorer covered by social assistance and the richer by individual contributions or private alternatives), such developments have undermined the commitment of the growing middle class to public service provision, a key to social cohesion.[8] Investment in public education is indispensable to counteracting such trends, equalizing opportunities and building an active citizenship.

B. Investing in education, including civic education

28. Education, besides improving lifetime and career opportunities resulting in upward mobility and the development of human capital, contributes to social cohesion through the transmission of values that are critical to a sense of belonging to a shared society. Education has the potential to foster not only cognitive and social skills but also positive attitudes, habits and norms that trigger healthy lifestyles and active citizenship. Some of these benefits include critical thinking and decision-making, the skill to interpret political communication, organizational skills and civic competencies.

29. Education for civic engagement is especially important for social cohesion. Civic engagement tends to improve labour market outcomes, reduce crime and foster democratic institutions and interpersonal trust. Interpersonal trust promotes economic growth and institutional efficiency and reduces corruption. Some researchers claim that the level of trust in a society is a good predictor of economic performance.[9]

30. In States members of OECD, better-educated individuals are, on average, more likely to exhibit higher levels of civic and social engagement than the less educated. European social surveys have indicated that each additional year of schooling is associated with a higher probability of participation in community or voluntary activities. Similarly, an analysis of the World Values Survey pointed to a high

[7] See the background paper prepared in the framework of the *2010 European Report on Development* by Stephen Devereux, entitled "Building social protection systems in Southern Africa". Available from http://erd.eui.eu/publications/erd-2010-publications/background-papers/building-social-protection-systems-in-southern-africa/.

[8] OECD, *Perspectives on Global Development 2012*.

[9] Sjoerd Beugelsdijk, Henri L. F. de Groot and Anton B. T. M. van Schaik, "Trust and economic growth", Tinbergen Institute Discussion Papers, No. 049/3 (Amsterdam and Rotterdam, Tinbergen Institute, 2002).

correlation between education and interpersonal trust in Canada, Japan and the United States of America.[10]

31. Experience has illustrated that teaching tolerance and respect for cultural diversity as part of the mainstream school curriculum, together with improving access of minorities to schooling, has contributed to social integration. Schools can advance tolerance by establishing an open classroom atmosphere, which tends to generate respect and trust between teachers and students as individuals and encourage dialogue regarding opinions and values. Schools can prepare students for civic participation by promoting involvement in student councils and volunteer projects.

32. Research suggests that tertiary education advances students' sense of interpersonal trust and tolerance further. The effect is pronounced when it offers a curriculum and academic environment conducive to a better understanding of diversity and the social and economic benefits of living in socially and culturally diverse communities.[11]

33. In many countries, in particular those with persistently weak labour markets, however, tertiary education has fallen short of preparing young people for employment, leaving large numbers of young people with university degrees unemployed, generating frustration and creating breeding grounds for social unrest. In response to such situations, increasing attention has been paid to technical and vocational skill development, in addition to entrepreneurship skills for business creation and self-employment of young people.

34. Educational institutions have a clear role in promoting civic education, democratic participation and volunteering. It is in the family and community that the individual experience of social integration first occurs and where social norms are instilled throughout childhood into youth, however.

C. Institutions and policy coherence

35. Experience has shown that the effective implementation of social inclusion policies depends primarily on a well-functioning network of government institutions in support of local authorities and communities, such as social inclusion units or local community task forces for social integration. Efficiency in the delivery of programmes rests on a comprehensive government approach requiring horizontal cooperation between relevant line ministries, facilitated by performance-based budgeting.

36. Even with well-functioning government institutions, inclusive policies do not automatically translate into positive social integration outcomes unless they are backed by broad-based participation of citizens in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

---

[10] See OECD, *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators* (Paris, 2010); the European social surveys conducted from 2002 to 2007; and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey conducted in 2003.

[11] The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study carried out in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is one of few available sources for evaluating the effects of education on civic and social engagement.

37. As noted previously, investment in civic education and community participation is the first step towards building a well-informed citizenry that is able to demand its rights and hold public officials accountable for their actions. The second step lies in building participatory frameworks and institutions in support of the economic, social, cultural and political participation of all members of society. The very extent of such participation is indicative of the level of social integration in the society itself. Individuals and social groups need ample opportunities to participate in decision-making processes affecting their well-being. When they have no opportunity to participate, or are purposely denied such an opportunity, they feel disempowered and grow distrustful of public authorities and institutions, which may lead to social unrest. Consequently, promoting participatory governance — that is, the direct involvement of stakeholders in the process of decision-making on matters that concern them directly — and active participation in all spheres of public life at the national and local levels is essential to the success of social integration efforts.[12]

38. National and local institutions promoting participatory governance and community engagement, such as civil society organizations, cooperatives and community boards, often representing vulnerable groups and demanding their rights, offer opportunities for civic engagement and participation.

39. Increasingly, civil society and non-profit organizations are demanding a participatory, focused model of interaction with public authorities, sometimes called community engagement governance, to improve the responsiveness of the public sector to public needs. Another demand put forward by civil society organizations is participatory budgeting, often considered a test of true commitment to participatory governance. While interest in participatory budgeting is growing overall, Governments continue to keep budget processes under their own scrutiny.

40. Efforts aimed at promoting participatory governance notwithstanding, limited institutional capacity and ingrained prejudices and stereotyping remain major obstacles to the social integration of some individuals and groups owing to their ethnicity, gender, age, immigration status or other characteristics. In response to this situation, countries have established national bodies mandated to counteract discrimination and investigate discrimination claims.

41. National human rights institutions, such as national human rights commissions or ombudspersons, have been set up in many countries to monitor and protect human rights. Human rights commissions are often tasked with reviewing national human rights legislation and existing policies. Ombudspersons (known as citizen advocates in some countries) investigate and address complaints of discrimination. They are usually appointed at the national level but can also be selected by local governments. In addition, in a few countries, new avenues for broader public participation in tackling human rights issues have been explored through a comprehensive variety of mechanisms, such as public hearings, advisory boards or formal consultative bodies.[13]

---

[12] Participatory governance denotes forms of governance in which civil society partners are empowered to use the resources of the State to make decisions about matters that concern them directly.

[13] Examples of such mechanisms can be found in *Good Governance Practices for the Protection of Human Rights* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.XIV.10). Available from www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GoodGovernance.pdf.

42. In the European Union, national equality bodies have been established, pursuant to the European Union equal treatment directives, to provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination. They conduct independent surveys on discrimination, monitor and report on discrimination issues and promote equality. The European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet) brings together 38 organizations from 31 countries that counteract discrimination on a range of grounds, including age, disability, gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. A decade after the implementation of the Racial Equality Directive and the gender equal treatment directives, no specific guidelines exist, however, on how such bodies should operate. Equality bodies provide assistance, in the form of legal advice, mediation or other measures, to people who experience discrimination. Most equality bodies also promote equal treatment through information campaigns and support good practices by employers and service providers.

43. The promotion of participatory governance mechanisms and community involvement is indispensable to the assurance of coherence and continuity in national and local policies and programmes on social inclusion. The work of institutions addressing discrimination and ensuring equality of rights and opportunities remains critical to assessing the outcomes of such policies and programmes and to tackling and providing guidance on gaps.

IV. Challenges

44. Social inclusion and social cohesion remain major public policy challenges globally, existing efforts to achieve social integration notwithstanding. Persistent poverty and exclusion, wide income disparities, unequal access to education, health services and job markets, and poor distribution of, and access to, social services have remained all too common in the developing world. Similar challenges have re-emerged, albeit on an another scale, in a number of developed countries.

45. In the wake of the economic and financial crisis of the late 2000s, many countries have made significant social spending cuts, including in the social protection field. Such austerity measures have had a significant negative impact on the livelihoods of the poor and vulnerable groups and on citizens' reliance on public authorities.[14] In several States members of OECD, the decline in social cohesion has been manifested through lower voter turnout, diminished volunteering and lower interpersonal trust. Other key dimensions of social cohesion, such as social and political trust, tolerance and perceptions, have been declining, sometimes dramatically, in a number of countries.[15]

46. Impediments to social inclusion and cohesion in some countries have included a lack of social mobility and reduced confidence in individual opportunity. Furthermore, the number of identity-based groups and associations has been increasing, an occurrence sometimes viewed as a response to the dearth of collective national objectives.[15]

[14] Isabel Ortiz and Mathew Cummins, "The age of austerity: a review of public expenditures and adjustment measures in 181 countries" (Initiative for Policy Dialogue and the South Centre, New York, March 2013).

[15] Andy Green, Germ Janmaat and Helen Cheng, "Regimes of social cohesion: converging and diverging trends" *National Institute Economic Review*, No. 2015 (January 2011).

47. At the regional level, the European model of development based on social rights has remained under pressure, its role in generating and maintaining social cohesion and social solidarity notwithstanding. According to paragraph 9 of the New Strategy and Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion, "the emerging pattern of a fragmented society, with an increasing number of people facing obstacles to the full enjoyment of rights or dependent on benefits and other public services, together with rising inequalities between rich and poor, poses one of the greatest challenges to social cohesion in Europe".

48. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the main factors that threaten social cohesion include widening social and cultural gaps, weak governance, the erosion of traditional sources of a sense of belonging and public mistrust of political institutions in democratic regimes.[16]

49. Countries have faced numerous constraints to the effective implementation of social inclusion policy, including poor coordination between government institutions in budgeting and social service delivery, insufficient investment in social services and limited involvement of civil society in the demand for change.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

50. **The role of social inclusion, social integration and social cohesion in promoting social development is receiving growing attention in development theory and practice and is acknowledged to be critical to achieving inclusive growth and development.**

51. **The overview provided herein has pointed to the critical importance of social protection, education and institution-building in enhancing social integration and social cohesion.**

52. **Social protection is a socioeconomic right and a form of institutionalized solidarity indispensable to social integration and social cohesion. Instead of being a loose collection of programmes, however, social protection provision should be at the centre of a coherent and integrated policy framework with legislative and governance underpinnings and sustainable funding. It is important to recognize the need to ensure protection throughout the lifespan, from childhood to old age, and to protect vulnerable groups based on their situation and characteristics. Social protection should not, however, be seen as a substitute for structural reforms often needed to tackle societal inequalities, unequal access to resources and persistent discrimination.**

53. **A comprehensive educational policy, emphasizing the principles of equality, common responsibility and shared society, is indispensable to the creation of an active citizenry. Imparting values and attitudes that appreciate diversity and promote human rights is vitally important to fostering inclusion.**

54. **Governments, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, must invest in building or strengthening participatory institutions mandated to eliminate**

[16] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Social Cohesion in Latin America*.

sources of social injustice, exclusion and discrimination. Policy responses implemented by such institutions should be subject to consultation and continuing monitoring and evaluation.

B. Recommendations

55. **Governments are urged to further develop and implement socially inclusive policies in the areas of social protection, education and participatory institution-building as part of their national development strategies.**

56. **Governments should strengthen interventions targeting vulnerable groups, while mainstreaming overall social integration objectives in all policies and programmes.**

57. **Governments are encouraged to establish national institutions in partnership with civil society and the private sector for implementing, monitoring and evaluating social inclusion policies at the national and local levels.**

58. **At the international level, advancing social integration, non-discrimination and equality should be an integral part of addressing inequality within the post-2015 development agenda.**